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MEDICAID'S *SMILE ALABAMA!* RECEIVES \$250,000 GRANT

The Alabama Medicaid Agency has received a grant of \$250,000 to enhance dental outreach efforts through the *Smile Alabama!* campaign. Funding for the grant is provided through the 21st Century Challenge Fund component of the Southern Rural Access Program and will be matched by federal, state, and private funds to total more than \$1 million.

Smile Alabama! is an initiative to recruit and retain a solid dental provider base for Medicaid children by asking dentists to accept at least one new Medicaid child per week. The program is a multifaceted campaign designed to improve access to Medicaid children for routine and preventive dental care through education, provider support, and fair reimbursement.

"We will continue to aggressively pursue outreach initiatives that will result in improving access to and utilization of routine and preventive dental care to all of the children served by Medicaid," said Medicaid Commissioner Mike Lewis. "We are committed to improving the oral health of the children of this state."

The 21st Century Challenge Fund is funded by the Princeton-based Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and administered by the Rural Health Policy Center of the Penn State College of Medicine. Grants are awarded to fund innovative pilot demonstrations or small analytical projects that address specific healthcare problems by increasing access to basic healthcare. Additional funding partners in *Smile Alabama!* include Alabama Power Foundation, Inc., Alabama Department of Public Health, Family HealthCare of Alabama (West Alabama Health Services, Inc.), and the University of Alabama at Birmingham.

Since the kick-off of *Smile Alabama!* in October 2000, Medicaid has responded to numerous inquiries about the program and added more than 26 new dentists who have enrolled to provide care for Medicaid children. In addition to new providers, Medicaid has had a significant response from inactive dental providers seeking to resume participation in the program.

Our Mission - to provide an efficient and effective system of financing health care for our beneficiaries.

Smile Alabama!

Healthy Smiles, Healthy Children

- Dental reimbursement rates have been increased to 100% of BCBS
- Simplification of the claims processing system
 1. Limited procedures requiring prior authorization
 2. Improved consistency between Medicaid billing requirements and the requirements of other insurers
- Expanded dental services for children
 1. Expanded dental coverage to a number of procedures previously non-covered
 2. Expanded coverage of dental sealants for two more years
- Enhanced provider outreach and education
 1. On-site visits to dental offices to provide technical claims processing support and training
 2. Frequent mail-outs to providers in the form of letters, *Provider Insider* articles, and alerts
- Aggressively working to address statewide issues of access and education relating to dental services
 1. Awarded Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Grant to further fund outreach efforts
 2. Selected to participate as one of eight states on a national team sponsored by the National Governor's Association to develop strategies to address oral health issues
 3. Continued work with the Dental Task Force to identify and address barriers to routine and preventive care